



Red Must Fall - A Steampunk Post WWI Story



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Chapter 1 by Tukker

Chicago, IL - 1920

Wellington Bailey focused on grabbing the drink off the bar, sweat rolled down his face as he moved methodically towards the glass. The man lost concentration for a second and suddenly his mechanical arm was no longer in tune with his desires. The wrist spun wildly as cogs and gears activated rubber belts that pulled and twisted the arm in strange directions with hisses of steam. Wellington grabbed the metal albatross with his fleshy left hand in an attempt to help tame the wild machine. But it was no good, if nothing else the robotic arm was strong. The steel limb lashed out wildly smashing the glass of whiskey it was trying to grab. Wellington clenched his teeth as sweat burned his eyes. "Outstanding," He mumbled as he undid the brown leather straps that held the abomination in place on his shoulder and crashed the prosthesis down on the oak bar.

"You will have to pay for that..." the needle on the arm of the record player lifted and moved to a new track, "sir." The bartender was a short steel and chrome robot that squeaked as it poured a glass of Canadian whiskey into a new tumbler. The barkeep rolled around on casters instead of

legs and had two simple arms with large rubberized fingers for hands. It had a phonograph where the head should be and four small wheels for feet. It played different tracks on the record. A lot of the speakeasy's had similar robots working there. They were cheap labor and if the bulls ever busted the joint losing a robot was a minor inconvenience. The owners or patrons was desirable.

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"Yeah." Wellington scowled at the phonograph faced bartender. He opened a drawer on the front of the robots chest and deposited a fifty-cent piece, "sorry 'bout the glass pal."

Wellington turned around and surveyed the room as he sipped his whiskey. The speakeasy was hop'n. There was a jazz band in full swing. The piano player was really flying up and down the keys. Wellington played some piano before the war and had really yearned to get back at it when he was overseas. The man looked down to where his right arm used to be and thought 'maybe not' and tossed back the rest of his whiskey. Everyone was dressed real nice the men in fedora's and pinstripe suits with shiny black shoes. The gals wore revealing shimmery flappers, some of which didn't go past the knees. Laughing and dancing, smoking and joking. The place was really alive.

"Good sir, let me buy you another," came a voice beside the disgruntled patron at the bar. Wellington turned to see a shorter, older gentleman, maybe in his sixties, staring back at him with a friendly closed mouth grin, a thick curled white mustache, a pipe in mouth and a monocle covering his left eye.

"And why would you want to do that?" Wellington inquired.

"You fought in the war am I right? Maybe lost your arm there I bet," the older man raised his eyebrows. Wellington still wore his long dark service trench-coat.

"Name's Wellington. Whiskey." Wellington said offering his left hand to the gentleman.

"I'm Gerald," the man smiled shaking the soldier's hand. He looked back at the robotic barkeep, "two whiskey's please." The older man deposited coins into the barkeeps drawer.

"France?" Gerald asked looking back at Wellington.

"Yeah," the soldier replied shyly, "wasn't fun."

"I can imagine," Gerald said taking his pipe out of his mouth, "some didn't get to come home at all

Mr. Wellington, I certainly appreciate what you and the other young men and women gave, good sir?

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I appreciate the drink m... heroes or anything like that I mean a lot were, but not all. It was a weird place to be... Wellington trailed off lost in

thought.

Wellington thought back to Somme, France. He thought about the bodies. The children. He thought about his squad's time in Somme with a heavy heart about soldiers who didn't make it out and land mines that ripped through his squad. He took a deep breath, picked up his prosthetic arm from the bar and fastened it back to his body using the leather straps.

"Thanks again for the drink," he said extending his hand. As he did so the tall double-doors to the Bushwhack Speakeasy flew open and a rush of cool October air rolled in. Instantly someone yelled "bulls!" and people panicked running and screaming. The band's instruments crashed to the ground in what sounded like musical vomit as the band members ran backstage.

Behind the bar the robotic barkeep threw a lever and the stage lights flipped to face forward right towards the day and with a loud thunk were all flipped on full bright.

"Thank you for coming," the needle lifted and changed tracks, "please visit again." The cops fired blind shots into the speakeasy.

Glasses smashed against the floor of the speakeasy and the robot barkeep rolled over to a dispenser where his drawer opened up and dumped all the money it carried down a chute.

"Let's go son," said Gerald as he took the pipe out of his mouth, turned it upside down and tapped it on the bar before putting the pipe into his coat pocket.

Running from the law had never been part of Wellington's plan. He didn't have a plan per say but if he did running from the cops wasn't in it. Since prohibition had been passed two years earlier in 1920 speakeasies had popped up all over New York. You could find a couple on every block and they were always being raided. There were literally more speakeasies than cops.

The bulls couldn't keep up.

Wellington threw his drink back, slammed the glass down and followed the older man towards

the back of the speakeasy.

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Gerald lead the soldier through panicked crowds to a door on the left side of the stage that lead to a narrow corridor. Wellington followed him to the door and pushed it open. He pressed his back against the sweaty wall to prevent himself from falling over.

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"Ooh I might have stood up too fas..."

"No time boy! Keep moving," the older man ordered. Wellington stood without the aid of the wall and gave his head a little shake and then continued down the corridor. He could feel a night breeze coming down the hall at them and noticed people leaving out a back door onto the streets. He shook his head again trying to keep his eyes from going crossed. Despite his best intentions he could feel his eyes wandering and crossing as if pulled by magnets.

"Not doin' very well here," he mumbled. He felt the older man duck his head under Wellington's arm and support most of his weight as they continued out the door.

"You aren't getting off this easy boy," the man blurted heaving the soldier out the door. Getting off? Wellington's confusion and disorientation encompassed him as the man shoved him in the sidecar of a motorcycle parked in the alley.

Wellington's head rattled around like a wind chime in a squall. He fought to sit up and keep his eyes open. He rolled his head to the left and saw Gerald on the seat of the iron beside him. The old man flicked the engine on, pulled the choke and tromped on the kick start three times before the engine roared to life with a bang and a cloud of black smoke. Gerald ducked as a shot rang out. The older man answered back by pulling out a Browning pistol. He aimed the gun at the cop who had shot at them and pulled the trigger. The cops chest exploded in a spray of blood and he dropped to the ground. The motorcycle roared down the alley as Wellington lost consciousness.

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